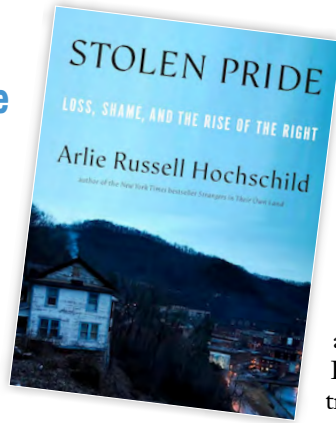


## Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right

By **Arlie Russell Hochschild**;  
The New Press, New York, 2024.  
Hardcover 383 pages.



Now the US election is over, there have been numerous post-mortems analyzing how it is possible that a narcissistic megalomaniac and felon could have won not only the electoral college vote (which may be a flawed process) but also the popular vote: Trump 49.9%, Harris 48.4%. The separation was razor thin and, as polling guru Nate Silver predicted, it could have gone either way. A key take-away is not that Trump won and Harris lost, but that the US population is split right down the middle. Explanations include the ravages of the economy (inflation, wage decline, jobs heading offshore), social media algorithms, the anti-elite rhetoric, the lingering Democratic association with Hillary Clinton’s 2016 dismissive remark about “a basket of deplorables”, and the “woke culture wars”.

One book published a few months ahead of the election is a particularly useful dive into the Trump heartland. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right* is the second of two books by Arlie Russell Hochschild that considers the deep-seated human, psychological and community reasons why so many Americans support populists and policies that other Americans find reprehensible, heretical and unfathomable. (Her earlier book, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, was about the rise of the Tea Party phenomenon in Louisiana.)

is clear that Trump voters are all irretrievable write-offs. Instead, she asks: How did this happen? And, if the prognosis is true, what can we do about it?

The bulk of her study investigates the lives of citizens in Pikeville and Pike County, in eastern Kentucky. She interviewed the mayor, members of the house of representatives (from both parties), police, teachers, students, coal miners, victims of OxyContin and alcohol addiction, felons and prison personnel, racists and progressives. Over six years, from 2017 through 2023, including during the Covid pandemic, she engaged with eighty Kentuckians in multiple, intense interviews. The region was once dependent on the coal mines, which have been closing, and is the “whitest and second-poorest congressional district in the country, a region that had rapidly shifted from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party.”

The book opens with an April 2017 white supremacist rally expected to invade Pikeville, led by neo-Nazi Matthew Heimbach. This intrusion is used by Hochschild as a device to reveal the variety of responses to extremism, ranging from those who are horrified or indifferent to those who are at least marginally sympathetic. The racist marchers are heavily armed. The police will separate the two sides. Very few

*Stolen Pride* is Hochschild’s effort to humanize the people many are inclined to ignore, which is what makes this accessible book so interesting and important. Her perceptive treatment bubbles up throughout. It she does not accept

locals will participate, there will be Antifa counter-protesting, the local university chaplain will try to engage with Heimbach. Others will lock their doors. But Hochschild will interview Heimbach and follow through on his journey right to the end of her book.

The overseer of the nearby Islamic Centre outside Prestonburg, Dr. Badrudduja, who immigrated from India in 1976 to “white Christian” Appalachia, did not feel like a foreigner, except after 9/11 when there was some targeting of Muslims. But he was an urgently needed medical doctor, and only recently did he find himself newly identified as a “person of color”. During the march, the local sheriff provided him additional police protection.

More than 2/3 of the book is devoted to the buildup preceding this racist rally, and what transpires through the lenses of several Pike County residents. Without spoiling the story here, what we learn is significant. *Stolen Pride* is a canary for what is to come with the return of Donald Trump in 2024, the “lightning in a jar”. We also get a close-up look at the “Stop the Steal” movement, which grew increasingly angry after the 2020 election result, and would be seen by some as “the last straw” justifying their drift towards right wing populism and anti-establishment rhetoric.

Trump’s disruption of a prior orderly world looms large. The local historian and proud law and order advocate, a member of Pikeville’s Fraternal Order of Police, Roger Ford toured Hochschild around his hometown, visiting graveyards and empty churches, expressing his distaste for liberal permissiveness, Black Lives Matter looters in Oregon, “hordes of undocumented migrants,” and particularly the mainstreaming of transgenderism – all seemed to him “like forms of unraveling, a frightening disorder that the Democrats were doing little or nothing to set straight.”

Others have also noted how transgender activism was a step too far in the culture wars, not necessarily for reasons of homophobic-transphobic bigotry, but rather as a challenge to religious faith or because many see transitioning medical procedures as harmful to children. This may have been why Trump's anti-trans campaign was so successful. There is data showing that while "cultural issues" like transgenderism may not have been top tier concerns, the trans issue was deeply polarizing and the most influential topic for undecided (swing) voters in November 2024. Many would vote for Trump. As the author of *The Identity Trap*, Yasha Mounk, observes: "voters who deeply distrust their own institutions are likely to vote for an anti-establishment bullfighter of their own."

Hochschild describes how poor rural whites have become even less optimistic than poor urban blacks because of deterioration of their "Protestant ethic" which had been the basis of their pride. The "pride paradox", a major theme within *Stolen Pride*, is exposed when economic conditions begin to fail (such as in the case of the destruction of the coal industry). Appalachians are proud of their devotion to hard manual work and take personal responsibility for their successes and failures. But the unions are losing influence, and coal is being displaced by solar energy. When circumstances beyond their control set in permanently, they are suddenly vulnerable to failure and will experience "unwarranted shame". Some must move far away from their homes and roots in Pike County.

They might respond differently, but many would project their shame outwards onto others (shifting the blame); or inwards and then fall into substance abuse and crime. They might embrace populists who point to foreigners stealing their jobs or others mocking them as uneducated hillbillies.

Then the unemployed miners might be charmed by right wing political extremism. The prior Protestant ethic that shifted away from self-reliance would turn towards "victimhood, shame, blame and revenge." While Republican voters think failure is your own fault, (the corollary being that the rich are wealthy because of their own effort), Democrats looked to the federal government for aid and welfare, which doesn't come.

*Stolen Pride* references David Keen's book *Shame: The Politics and Power of an Emotion* in several sections. Keen takes a political science approach rather than a psychosocial approach (such as

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Hochschild's) and points to the role of shame in historical conflict, as can be found from Germany to Sudan and Iraq. Hochschild writes: "in conflict there is scarcity, ethnic competition, economic decline, and a mix of all these, but always, Keen argues, there is shame, resistance to that shame, and a desire for revenge."

Hochschild similarly describes a four-part shame-to-blame ritual that Trump regularly performs. It starts with a provocative statement (such as that "the Mexicans coming to the USA are rapists"). He is criticized (shamed) for his outrageous comment. Then he claims to be the victim of shaming. Finally, he "roars back at the shamers",

accusing them of misrepresentation and exaggeration. We learn that this method can be empowering to those who feel their pride and dignity have been stolen by elites. In the case of the "stolen election", which plays to concerns over traditional society being trammelled by Democratic elites, queue jumpers and line-cutters, this narrative is also aided by online and network news sources. Fox News would later admit they announced a stolen election even while knowing it hadn't been. (Newscaster Tucker Carlson, we are informed, also edited a tape of the January 6 riot to sanitize it by removing evidence of violent episodes.) But the media contagion is evident on both sides of the aisle. "Liberal" media claimed the BLM protests following the killing of George Floyd were peaceful (and as Hochschild points out, 93% of protesters were non-violent.) But in Pike County, citizens "were tuned to media focusing on the 7 percent that were indeed violent." And while the progressive left got much of the attention in the culture wars, the data indicate they compose only 6% of the American public.

*Stolen Pride's* greatest asset is Arlie Hochschild's exemplary compassion, and her ability to see people as humans rather than as victims or miscreants. That includes those holding terrible ideas that she obviously rejects. She deals directly with them and discovers the stories and torments that shaped their lives. This provides an opportunity for readers to come to understand these people -- half of America -- rather than to dismiss and demonize them.

Her advice? Cross the empathy bridge, skip the partisanship, reach out and heal the divide. This may be what we all need to do if we are going to depolarize our citizenship. ■

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*Reviewed by Robin Collins, who lives in Ottawa.*